

## Sexual Development



### KEY TAKEAWAY

The way you touch, care for and talk about your toddler's body sends important messages.

Think about your own values and beliefs and what you want to communicate to your child about sexuality. Consider:

- ✓ using medical or scientific terms for all body parts, from nose to vagina
- ✓ remembering that curiosity about the body is normal
- ✓ thinking ahead about how you'll answer your toddler's questions, so you're less anxious when they come up
- ✓ talking about the difference between what's okay in public and what's meant for private



### TRY THIS

Let them decide who they want to hug and kiss. This teaches them that they have control over their body.

### Sexual Development by Age

**From birth to 24 months**, your child may:

- enjoy being naked
- like to touch parts of their body, including genitals
- get erections or vaginal lubrication as a natural reflex

**From 24 to 36 months**, your child may:

- touch their genitals or masturbate
- notice gender differences
- explore bodies ("play doctor or nurse") with a same-age playmate
- be interested in body functions



### DANGER

Although there can be many reasons for changes in your child's behaviour, some changes may signal abuse. Talk with your health care provider if your child:

- develops a strong, constant focus on their own and others' genitals
- doesn't follow your rules around respecting and not touching others' private areas
- has discharge, swelling or bruising in the genital area

### Masturbating and Exploring



### DID YOU KNOW?

It's as normal for your child to touch their genitals as it is for them to explore their toes or fingers.

Toddlers are naturally curious about their bodies. And once they begin to explore, they quickly learn that touching their genitals feels good.

**If your toddler is touching themselves in public**, remind them that genitals are personal areas, best explored in private spaces like their own bedroom. Offer a toy or other distraction.

**If they're exploring genitals with another child of similar age**, calmly tell them their genitals are private and shouldn't be touched or looked at by other people unless they have given them permission. Re-direct them to another activity, and ask them if they have questions.

**If your child is exploring genitals with someone else**, have a calm conversation about it. Reassure your child that they haven't done anything wrong, but emphasize that no one should touch or see their genitals without their consent. If you have any concerns, discuss them with your health care provider.